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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #3

(Desired family size and improved health sustainably achieved)

Population exec says vasectomy still unpopular

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer News Service

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CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Less than one percent of married men in Central Luzon practice family planning methods, particularly vasectomy, a Population Commission official said.

There has been slow progress as few towns and cities, like San Fernando and Angeles in Pampanga, actually operate vasectomy centers on a regular basis, according to Rosa Fortaleza, Popcom regional director.

The region's biggest government-run hospital, the Jose B. Lingad Memorial Hospital, for instance, does not have a vasectomy clinic and a permanent staff to carry out the simple and nonsurgical procedure, said Dr. Juvencio Ordoña, regional director of the Department of Health.

In a region where 2.3 million of its 8.2 million residents are men between 15 and 54 years old, vasectomy or male sterilization is shunned because it is regarded as damaging to the “macho” image.

“That’s the number one cause,” Ordoña said.

Others believe – wrongly - that the method weakens one’s sexual prowess, he said.

He and Fortaleza noted that the burden of reproductive health care among couples is still on the women.

At least 18.3 percent of women covered by the 2003 National Demographic and Health Survey in Central Luzon reported using tubal ligation or female sterilization, making it the most used family planning method in the region.

In Angeles City, however, the family planning campaign is making a headway among tricycle drivers. In a session alone, at least 15 drivers underwent vasectomy.

“Pinapakita ko na mahal ko ang asawa ko (I’m demonstrating that I love my wife),” was the reason most often cited by the drivers, said Fortaleza.

The DOH, Ordoña said, has not set targets in terms of how many men and women should avail themselves of sterilization.

“We advocate only couple’s choice. We don’t intimidate or give incentives,” Ordoña said.

He said couples usually start using contraceptives after the first child. The same survey also showed that more women want to use contraceptives.

The supply of contraceptives, however, is expected to drop as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will stop this year its subsidy for birth control pills and condoms.

Fortaleza said both Popcom and the DOH are now helping local governments, mandated by law to take on the population management program, to identify their requirements and be self-reliant.